
The Four Personae of Racism: Educators' (Mis)Understanding of Individual Vs. Systemic Racism

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Abstract

This study used CRT to engage educators in critical discourse regarding the persistence of racism in urban schooling. A combined method of action research and critical case study was employed to raise a group of educators' race consciousness through antiracist training. Findings revealed conflicting views of racism as an individual pathology vs. a systemic problem, which led to the development of four personae of racism: the conscious perpetrators, the unconscious perpetrators, the deceived perpetrators/activists, and the enlightened perpetrators/activists. The study found that the participants were largely deceived by their social activism to recognize their perpetuation of racism through their practice.

Keywords

achievement gap, activism, racism, social justice, urban education, White teachers, teacher development, race

Introduction

In his widely acclaimed, yet highly controversial book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, Goldhagen (1996) argued that the massacre of 6 million European Jews during the Holocaust

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was not due to the sadistic desires of one mad man but rather to the pervasive sentiment of anti-Semitism that resided deeply in the ideology of ordinary German citizens. When the anti-Semitic fury that lay latent in the hearts of Germans was released in their quest for Aryan dominance, the world witnessed the decrepitude of humankind as ordinary men and women shot, gassed, and experimented on the Jews on the sole basis of their ethnicity. The legalized and widely accepted assaults on the Jews in the decades prior to World War II made it merely a matter of time before hatred turned into slaughter. Goldhagen thus claimed that *all* of German society was complicit in the murder of the Jews, for it was their belief in their own racial superiority that laid the rationale for the Holocaust.

The theory behind Goldhagen's (1996) argument echoes eerily in the United States's own history. Slave narratives attest to the heinous abuses inflicted on those of African descent, such as being stripped and sold as chattel, whipped to death by a blood-stained cowskin, and raped at the master's leisure (Gates, 1987). Even after the emancipation of the slaves, African Americans found themselves unprotected and unjustly treated. The Jim Crow era barred blacks from equal access to public property, legalized hate crimes, and denied them their voting rights. Lynching became prevalent, and the ghastly sights of Black men and women hanging limply on nooses scattered across the countryside became commonplace. Racism, like anti-Semitism, became the rallying cry for ethnic hatred.

Racial discrimination was not only limited to Blacks, however. In need of fast, cheap labor, the United States opened its doors to Asians in the 1800s to work as railroad construction workers, miners, sugar cane plantation farmers, fruit pickers, and substitutes for former slaves on southern plantations (Takaki, 1993, 1995). Likewise, in the 1900s, Mexicans were encouraged to cross the border, and the men quickly became the primary source of manual labor in construction while the women were employed as dishwashers, servants, maids, and workers in garment factories (Takaki, 1993). Immigrant workers were often subjected to verbal and physical abuse, and their "strange" cultures made them easy targets for harassment. Xenophobic sentiments fueled the hostilities directed toward the foreign laborers.

Critical race theory (CRT) scholars attribute racism as the underlying cause of inequalities in law, employment, health care, housing, and education. They reject the viewpoint that racism is symptomatic of individual pathology; instead, they position racism as a systemic condition that is pervasively and permanently rooted in the ideology of the masses (Bell, 1987, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995; Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

CRT in Law

CRT originated in the field of law, where legal scholars of color argued that the judicial system persistently and unjustly inflicts inequalities on people of color (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, 1988). Ever cognizant of their “double consciousness” (DuBois, 1903/1969), racial minorities recognize that the worldview that they employ differs significantly from the worldview of the dominant group. As this sense of duality is impalpable to White Americans, the struggle of the critical race theorists is to raise the race consciousness of the dominant group by compelling them to attend to the voices of the marginalized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Matsuda, 1987).

CRT scholars contend that power is socially and historically constructed and that the oppressed consent to their own subjugation through forces of hegemony. Gramsci (1971) characterized hegemony as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (p. 12). In the event that the masses are in opposition to the dominant group, the latter will exert coercive power to “‘legally’ enforce[e] discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively” (p. 12). Critical race scholars look on this concept of hegemony to explain “the continued legitimacy of American society by revealing how legal consciousness induces people to accept or consent to their own oppression” (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1351).

Harris (1993) associates Whiteness as a property right, that anyone in possession of it is guaranteed membership into a position of power and privilege. She writes,

[B]eing White automatically ensure[s] higher economic returns in the short term, as well as greater economic, political and social security in the long run . . . over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law (p. 1713).

Similarly, Tatum (1997) likens White privilege to the image of a moving conveyor belt. The belt, which represents the systemic nature of racism, moves in the direction that benefits the dominant group regardless of an individual’s path of travel on the belt. Whether one is standing idly by, walking in the direction of, or running in the opposite direction of it, the belt compels all of its passengers to acquiesce, willingly or unwillingly, to its forward momentum. To effectively challenge White privilege, therefore, requires a structural change—one that aims to reverse the direction of the belt in a methodical manner.

Since the mid-1990s, education scholars have adopted CRT from legal scholarship as a new lens to reexamine the underpinnings of racism in school policies and practices. As with legal scholars, critical race theorists in education assume the theoretical viewpoint that “racism is endemic to American life” (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) in an effort to challenge the deeply rooted cultural capital of Whiteness that persist in American schools.

CRT in Education

The centrality of race in CRT scholars’ examination of legal issues subsequently led to a similar movement among education scholars. Most notably, CRT scholars have used the concepts of systemic racism (Aléman, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003), Whiteness as property (Gillborn, 2008; Stovall, 2006; Vaught & Castagno, 2008), counternarratives (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Howard, 2008; Knaus, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and interest convergence (Beratan, 2008; Chapman, 2008; Milner, 2008) to analyze the racial inequities that persist in schools. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1998) urges school leaders and educators to critically examine how race is played out in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school funding, in particular, as they relate to the suppression of “intellectual rights” of minority children.

Underlying the CRT perspective is the need for educators to examine how they may be complicit in the promotion of White dominance at the expense of minority students’ opportunities for academic success (Stovall, 2006). Well-intentioned educators must not only become aware of their own racial biases but also deliberately work toward antiracist practices (Blumer & Tatum, 1999). Ladson-Billings and Grant (1997) describe antiracist education as a practice that

challenges the total school environment to understand the ways in which racism is manifested in schools and society. It encourages educators to integrate antiracist concepts into all subject areas . . . [And it] attempts to reveal the adverse effects of racism on student learning and development (p. 20).

As CRT asserts that racism is deeply rooted in the structure of schools, this study aimed to raise a group of administrators’ and teacher leaders’ race consciousness by engaging them in introspective and controversial conversations about race and racism. The research questions driving the study were as follows:

Research Question 1: What process is involved in the coparticipatory inquiry and implementation of antiracist training among the researcher, the administrators, and teacher leaders in an effort to raise their race consciousness?

Research Question 2: How does the framework of CRT fit with the administrators' and teacher leaders' viewpoint of the pervasive nature of racism in the policies and practices of the school?

Method

CRT is inherently dialogical, and it calls for a methodology that seeks to engage participants in counterhegemonic efforts. This approach requires the researcher and the participants to be immersed in a process of collaborative inquiry so as to mutually strive to better understand and alter the existing sociopolitical conditions for and with the oppressed (Friedman, 2001; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This article reports on the first of a two-part research project that attempted to use a combined method of critical case study and action research to accomplish a twofold purpose: One, to raise the race consciousness of educators by engaging them in critical discourse on the tenets behind CRT through professional development training; two, to coconstruct a pedagogy rooted in the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracism by drawing on the participants' understanding of CRT (Young, 2010).

Merriam (1988) defines qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 16). The case study method is appropriate when one seeks to understand *how* and *why* a phenomenon occurs within its context (Yin, 2003). Unlike case studies in general, however, a *critical* case study "assume[s] theoretically that oppression and domination characterize the setting and seek[s] to uncover how patterns of action perpetuate the status quo" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 106). This approach is particularly fitting with the study as the epistemological rationale behind the project stems from a critical view of how racism is unintentionally perpetuated through school policies and practices. By using the elements of qualitative case study methods, such as naturalistic inquiry, holistic perspective, inductive analysis, attention to change, and empathic neutrality (Patton, 1990), this study attempts to unravel the racist ideologies embraced by well-intentioned educators at one particular school and their collaborative effort to strive toward antiracist pedagogy.

Moreover, action research resonates with a Freirean philosophy and the fundamental principles of CRT (Freire, 1970/2005). Action research is

“research *with*, rather than *on* practitioners, who in many instances become co-researchers themselves” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. xxv). Underlying the research endeavor is the assumption that issues of power are at play, whereby raising the participants’ consciousness to the present state of social injustice is necessary to propel individuals into action by building a community of inquiry. Therefore, in lieu of traditional interviews, observations, and analysis of materials in an effort to *understand* a culture or phenomenon, action researchers seek to coconstruct research questions, designs, and agendas through ongoing inquiry so as to *transform* the circumstances. Together, the researcher and the participants endeavor to “bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 1). In the end, both are mutually committed to the overthrow of hegemonic structures and the emancipation of the oppressed.

My primary role in the first half of the study was to organize the topics and readings for each weekly discussion and to act as a participant observer throughout the process of critical discourse. In the second half of the study, the participants and I acted as coresearchers as we mutually determined the direction, design, and implementation of an inquiry-based project to coconstruct curriculum from a culturally relevant and antiracist lens. At all times, I was aware of the need to engage the participants as coresearchers in the inquiry process and to check my role as a coparticipant in the study. The weekly agenda and assigned readings were frequently changed to accommodate the questions and concerns that surfaced from the group. The appendix provides an outline of the topics that transpired in the inquiry group meetings in its final form.

Setting

The study took place at Maplewood Elementary School,¹ which was located in a large urban area in the northeastern part of the United States. Since 2003, Centralia School District had been making a concerted effort to examine the long-standing achievement gap between its minority and nonminority students from the perspective of race. Not only had the district been purposely analyzing student performances on state assessment tests from a racial lens but many principals and teachers had also attended institutes led by prominent education scholars as well as participated in monthly professional development sessions to continue the dialogue on race and achievement.

Table 1. Description of the Participants

Name	Race	Role at school	Years of experience in the district	School leadership team?	Cultural diversity team?
Lynn	Latina	Principal	30	Yes	Yes
Amy	Black Caribbean	3rd-grade teacher	15 (also previously taught in Trinidad)	Yes	Yes
Jamie	White	Special education teacher	8	Yes	No
Karen	White	3rd-grade teacher	25	Yes	Yes
Bob	White	Science teacher	8 (second career)	Yes	No
Madison	White	Kindergarten teacher	2	Yes	No
Will	White	Principal intern	1	Yes	No
Researcher	Asian American	Participant-observer/ researcher	—	No	No

The total student enrollment at Maplewood for 2007–2008 was approximately 220 students. The demographic breakdown of the student population was roughly 40% African American, 40% Latina/o, 12% White, 5% Asian, and 3% Other. Based on the 2008 Adequate Yearly Progress report under No Child Left Behind, Maplewood fell in the “Corrective Action” category for English Language Arts (ELA) and “Needs Improvement” category for mathematics on the state’s standardized test. The performance level of African American and Latina/o students at Maplewood Elementary School skewed heavily to the Needs Improvement and Warning/Failing categories in both subject areas, despite the school’s many attempts at providing additional services to boost the achievement of minority students.

Participants

In all, eight participants took part in the study, which included the school principal, five teachers, a principal intern, and me. Seven of the participants were members of the school’s leadership team, and many of them played

active roles in the school, the district, and professional organizations. Table 1 outlines each participant's race, role at the school, and the years of experience in the district.

In pursuing the school leaders for this study, I first contacted the interim director of the Achievement Gap Committee at Centralia School District. His direct involvement in the districtwide effort to devise and implement "The Comprehensive Achievement Gap Plan" provided him inside knowledge of each of the schools' attempts to address the gap from the perspective of race. He recommended that I contact the principal at Maplewood Elementary because she stood out among other principals as one who exhibited race-conscious leadership.

The principal, Lynn, had been working in the district for 30 years as a teacher and an administrator. At the time of the study, she was in the 17th year as the principal at Maplewood Elementary. Under her leadership, the school had received numerous awards and recognitions, including the Excellence in Technology Award in 1998, the School Improvement Award in 2000, and the Effective Practice School Certificate in 2001. Her conviction to center race in the discussion of the achievement gap, her ongoing efforts to reflect on and actively resist racism in schooling as well as her highly regarded leadership qualities within the district made her an ideal candidate for the study.

In selecting the participants for the study, I asked the principal to provide me a list of teachers who she thought would be interested in the topic. She gave me names of teachers who were members of the Cultural Diversity Team and/or members of the School Leadership Team (see Table 1). Amy and Karen had both previously attended cultural awareness trainings as well as engaged in "courageous conversations" about race in professional development seminars. As educators who were mindful of multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, their participation in the study was motivated by a desire to unravel racism in schooling. Bob, Jamie, and Madison were members of the School Leadership Team but not of the Cultural Diversity Team. It was uncertain whether their participation in the project was motivated by an intrinsic desire to become more race conscious or by external factors such as encouragement from the principal, a sense of obligation as a member of the School Leadership Team, or the small monetary compensation at the end of the study. Meanwhile, Will, who had previously been a teacher at the Chicago Public Schools and was intending to take up a principal position there after completing his master's degree in educational leadership, asked to join the study when he learned of the project's emphasis on promoting antiracism in urban education. As an Asian American who taught in urban schools for 6 years, and who grew up in a family environment that openly expressed racial

distrust and denigrated people of African and Latino/a or Hispanic descent, my interest in the topic was both personal and professional. All of the participants who took part in the study volunteered to commit to 3 months of critical self-reflection and the coconstruction of antiracist pedagogy with the knowledge that weekly readings and writing assignments would be involved. They were also aware that at least one formal classroom observation would be made during the course of the study.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study entailed pre and postinquiry group interviews, inquiry group meetings, meetings with the principal and the intern, classroom observations, participants' reflections, district's documents, online discussions, and researcher journal. For a fuller description of the data collection process, see Young (2010).

Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed deductively using the tenets of CRT and inductively using grounded theory. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the codes that were generated through the process of open coding and the key concepts from the data that characterized the codes. I also employed axial coding to look for relationships between the categories and to assess whether novel themes emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process of axial coding revealed a fundamental rift between CRT's claim that racism is rooted in a systemic problem and the participants' view of racism as being rooted in an individual pathology (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). The divide between the participants' view of conscious versus unconscious racism, individual versus systemic racism, and passive versus active racism led to the emergence of four different personae of racism, which is described below.

Four Personae of Racism

As mentioned earlier, Tatum (1997) paints a metaphor of racism as a moving conveyor belt. Everyone on this belt falls into one of three categories: the active racist, the unconscious racist, and the active antiracist. Although this analogy aptly differentiates racism as a system of privilege from racism as individual acts of hatred, it is flawed on one account. It assumes that at any given time, a person who is enlightened of this phenomenon has the power to turn 180° and walk against the momentum of the moving belt. Hegemony

Table 2. Coding of Data Using CRT and Grounded Theory

Codes	Key concepts in quotes
Deductive analysis using CRT	
<i>Endemic nature of racism</i>	
System of power	Dominant knowledge; norm; top-down control; society's neglect of urban education
Subtleness of racism	Stereotype threat; political correctness; everyday people doing everyday businesses
Unaware of White privilege	Disidentification with Whiteness; SES, not race
<i>Skepticism toward colorblindness</i>	
Embracing diversity through colorblindness	Recognize students as individuals, not by race; teach all kids in the same way
Value-free curriculum	Science is neutral; standards are objective
<i>Historicity of racism</i>	
Civil Rights Movement brought equality	The problem of racism has been fixed; more emphasis on diversity than ever
Deculturalization	Seeks identification with Whiteness; assimilation = cultural genocide
Counternarratives	
Attention to voice	Engage students in dialogue; openly share experiential knowledge
<i>Eliminating all oppression</i>	
Many forms of oppression	Discrimination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation
Color consciousness	Engage in culturally sensitive instruction; see from the students' perspective
Actively challenge racism	Stand up to injustices; openly confront racism
Inductive analysis using grounded theory	
<i>Definition of social justice</i>	
Respect for diversity	Respect/tolerance; celebrating/affirming culture
Individualized instruction	Attention to uniqueness/differentiated instruction
Teachers as activists	Teaching different views; critical self-reflection
<i>Racism is due to individual pathology</i>	
Examples of active racists	"Aryan-nation nutcases"; those who act on stereotypes; racist jokes; "others"

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Codes	Key concepts in quotes
Thought vs. action	Everyone has prejudices, but racists are those who act on their thoughts; spectrum of racism
<i>Unintentional cultural bias</i>	
Low expectations	Assuming students can't make it; making excuses
Blaming parents	Students do not get educational support from home; parents are not involved at school
Dominant knowledge = power	Does not question where knowledge comes from
Savior mentality	"Help" students to overcome their circumstances

has far greater control over the beliefs, desires, and wills of individuals than a simple pivoting of one's foot, however. After four centuries of discrimination and oppression, racism in America has become an entity of its own, and the control that it has over the populace's mindset is one that should not be slighted. The political, social, and religious ideologies originally created by the founding fathers now control us—our thoughts, our actions, and our perception of the world as it "should" be. The stronghold of hegemony cannot be overcome simply by walking the other way. We are intricately tied to its perversity, and we deceive ourselves if we believe that we can somehow transcend beyond its power.

Using CRT's contention that racism is rooted in a system of privilege rather than in individual pathology, I found that the data revealed four personae of racism: the conscious perpetrators, the unconscious perpetrators, the deceived perpetrators/activists, and the enlightened perpetrators/activists. Conscious perpetrators are those who intentionally commit acts of racism, such as practicing purposeful, albeit sometimes subtle, discrimination on the basis of race. Unconscious perpetrators incur acts of hostility or speak words of denigration with no awareness of malice or foul play. Deceived perpetrators/activists devote themselves passionately to the causes of the racially oppressed, and yet in their unrelenting fight for social justice, they are blinded by a false idealism that renders them incapable of seeing themselves as contributors to an oppressive system. Enlightened perpetrators/activists recognize the hegemonic nature of racism, and although the goal is to assist others to reach a stage of conscientization (Freire, 1970/2005), they realize that no matter how determinately they confront racial and social inequality, they are inevitably tied to a system in which they are simultaneously a product and a producer of White dominance.

Racism as Acts of Conscious Perpetrators

One of the questions that I asked the participants during the preinterviews was, “In what ways do you believe that racism still exists today?” Every one of the participants recognized that it existed in some shape or form, but he or she disagreed to the extent in which it exists. Many of the teachers saw racism as a phenomenon that only incriminated the conscious perpetrators, such as those who made racist jokes and stereotypical remarks based on first impressions.

Furthermore, when asked the question, “How would you describe someone who is a racist,” nearly all of them readily pointed their fingers at the “others” out there. Jamie defined a racist as someone who “thinks [he or she is] better than everyone else and puts down others,” and Madison viewed a racist as one who “accepts stereotypes and does not challenge them.” Meanwhile, Bob regarded the Wallace Democrats and Dixiecrats—individuals who proudly and passionately ascribe to a segregationist ideology—as examples of racists. Thus, implicit in their view of racists were stereotypical images of “old White men convening in clandestine meetings plotting the demise of people of color” (Stovall, 2006, p. 250).

Amy, however, recognized the subtlety in which racism rears its head nowadays. To her, the public has become politically correct enough to avoid making assaultive remarks for the sake of consensual coexistence. Instead, often it is the words that are not said, the nuances in which a comment is made, or an unobvious act of discrimination that makes her question whether racism is still as prevalent today as it was in the past.

However, the participants who regarded racism as something more pervasive and more deeply entrenched in the crevices of society recognized that individuals could inflict racism either by will or by ignorance. In short, they understood that one could be an “unconscious racist” and that the unintended consequences of one’s blind actions contributed equally to the root of racial oppression (Cochran-Smith, 2000).

Racism as Acts of Unconscious Perpetrators

Bob perhaps articulated it best when he differentiated conscious versus unconscious racism as acts on a “spectrum.” When describing someone who is a racist, he said, “You got a spectrum, you know, from some kind of Aryan-nation nutcase . . . to your more ordinary person who sees everything as being the way that it should be” (postinterview). As Bob noted, those who actively commit hate crimes toward racially oppressed groups are now in the

minority. Cross-burning and lynching are more or less a thing of the past, and members of the Ku Klux Klan have been driven into anonymity. However, as Bob recognized, the majority of racists that exist today are not those “Aryan-nation nutcases”; they are everyday people doing their everyday businesses, who go about their routines without giving a second thought as to how their unquestioning acceptance of life as it indicates their approval for “Aryan domination.” The majority of White Americans today believe that racism went away with the Civil Rights Movement and that the objectives of racial equality and multiculturalism have been achieved with the call for colorblindness (Bergerson, 2003; Culp, 1994). Critical race theorists view the notion of colorblindness as highly problematic, however. As Harris (1993) argues, nonrecognition of race protects the property interest of Whites and denies the historical and social context of White domination. Furthermore, Gotanda (1991) contends that a colorblind interpretation of the Constitution merely maintains “the social, economic, and political advantages that Whites hold over other Americans” (pp. 2-3).

Disbelievingly, Bob remarked at the predominance of unconscious racism that still lingers in society today:

You have a lot of people who are racist who don't believe they're racist. And this is very confusing to me sometimes because it's very clear that they are, and that [the things they do] are . . . really hostile, and then they think that they're not (preinterview).

Other participants also expressed similar bewilderment at the thought of how unconscious racism continues to be a rampant and enduring problem in society today. In response to the question, “In what ways do you feel that racism still exists in society?” Lynn sighed with exasperation, “*Everywhere . . . everywhere!* In the way you act, in the way you think . . . in the way that we teach, in the way that we talk” (preinterview). Similarly, Will laughed sarcastically as he retorted, “In what ways? I mean, it's extremely prevalent . . . and it's ingrained in people's heads . . . [it] is still very much alive in this country” (preinterview).

Although many of the administrators and teachers in the study recognized that one did not need to be a conscious perpetrator to encourage the persistence of a racist society, they nonetheless regarded racism as acts of individual perpetration rather than as a system of privilege. This is because they, like the majority of Americans who accept the normalcy of Whiteness, view “individualism as a natural facet of life” (Scheurich, 1993, p. 6). The well-accepted credo of “rugged individualism” explains away differences in social

hierarchies based on race to one's work ethic, ability, and merit (Scheurich, 1993). It also allows one to conveniently dismiss the power and privilege associated with one's membership in an elite social group (Applebaum, 2008). Bob, Lynn, and Will's criticism of the persistence of racism is less rooted in their critique of an inequitable system but more in their outrage at the ignorance of individuals who blindly contribute to racism. Interestingly, however, neither Bob nor Will saw themselves as *those* individuals who also unconsciously contributed to racism by virtue of their membership in the circle of Whiteness. As the next section reveals, their compassion for working with underprivileged children in an urban setting made it difficult for them to see that despite their activism, their Whiteness nonetheless rendered them culpable of racism.

Racism as Acts of Deceived Perpetrators/Activists

When asked if they would consider themselves as a racist during the preinterviews, all of the participants except for Lynn immediately answered no, although they qualified their response by drawing a distinction between thought versus action. As Will tried to explain, "Where I grew up, we define[d] the term 'racism' as the thought [and] 'discrimination' as the *act* of the thought" (preinterview). Based on Will's definition, a person is only a racist when he or she crosses the line between "racism" and "discrimination." That is, as long as one only *thinks* negatively about people of color but does not *act* on his or her thoughts, one is exempt from being a racist. Thus, although Will admits that he has "racist tendencies," his ability to catch himself from turning a prejudiced thought into a hostile act renders him "very low" on the racist scale.

However, Bob readily answered, "I would not [consider myself a racist] . . . I kind of like all kinds of people . . . I'm gregarious by nature" (preinterview). Bob's response mirrors that of many Whites who are asked to confront their racialized self. As Tatum (1992) noted, the White students in her class often jump to the defensive by saying, "I'm not racist myself, but I know people who are, and I want to understand them better" (p. 8). In an attempt to resist their collusion with Whites in general, they instead highlight their ethnicity or their social status (Katz & Ivey, 1977). In our discussion of our own racial identities, Madison was quick to remark, "We (pointing to herself and Karen) . . . we didn't consider ourselves as White. We identified ourselves as Belgian and Irish." Meanwhile, Bob pointed to his poor Catholic status as an indication that he "felt wicked out of place" from the White race.

The invisibility of Whiteness is well-documented in studies on White racism and critical Whiteness studies (Applebaum, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2000; Fine, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002; Henze, Lucas, & Scott, 1998; Leonardo, 2002; Marx, 2004; McIntosh, 1990; McIntyre, 1997; Roediger, 1991, 1994; Sleeter, 1994, 2001; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2004; Tatum, 1992). Researchers in this field have endeavored to engage preservice and in-service teachers in discourse to make Whiteness visible and to centralize Whites in the position of domination and exploitation. Across the board, the studies noted above have found varying degree of resistance from the participants when asked to acknowledge and confront their Whiteness. The volume of studies on this topic has been instrumental in forwarding the field of education to address the deep-seated social and racial inequalities present in American schooling.

Unlike unconscious perpetrators who seek to remain in willful ignorance of White privilege, those in the deceived perpetrator/activist camp live in denial of their complicity in racism because they see themselves as good, open-minded people who are accepting of everyone regardless of race, gender, class, religion, or creed. The teachers in the study appeared to be deceived by the belief that racist ideologies were controllable and that if only one could refrain from turning racist thoughts into actions, he or she could be not blamed for the persistence of racism in society. As dedicated educators in a low-income urban neighborhood, they saw themselves as race-conscious individuals who fought against racism rather than contributed to it. Moreover, they employed a “savior mentality” (Popkewitz, 1998) that was common among urban educators, and they were deceived by their activism to recognize their unintentional promotion of the culture of Whiteness onto their students. Scheurich (1993) argues that Whites who are committed to addressing racism often fall victim to the “good” Whites/“bad” Whites fallacy. He contends,

It does not matter whether we are a “good” or a “bad” White; all Whites are socially positioned as Whites and receive social advantages because of this positionality. No individual White gets to be an exception because of his or her antiracism (p. 9).

As race-conscious educators, the participants’ appreciation for cultural diversity and their fervor for educational democracy made it nearly impossible for them to see that they, too, could be part of the problem rather than the solution. In fact, racism blinds those who are most committed to its extinction. The more strongly one advocates on behalf of the oppressed, the more detached one is to his or her sense of culpability and, in turn, the more one becomes deceived by his or her activism.

Racism as Acts of (Partially) Enlightened Perpetrators/Activists

The only participant in the group who recognized that she was blameworthy for perpetuating racism was the principal. When asked if she considered herself a racist, she answered without hesitation,

Yes, I do. Because I mean, not to be a racist you need to have a lot of courage. You need to be able to stand up to even the people that you love . . . When we let go of certain comments, I'd say we're still showing traces of being racist.

Unlike other teachers who saw racism as acts of hostility, Lynn was keenly aware that the beholding of racist ideologies alone rendered one a racist. Moreover, she saw herself as a racist largely because she often balked when she should have challenged racism when confronted with it.

However, despite her heightened awareness of her own culpability to the endemic nature of racism, she still perceived racism as an individual conduct rather than as a system of privilege. She believed that everyone has racist tendencies in him or her and that most people today have become blind to those tendencies. Like the other participants she regarded the definition of a racist as the *degree* of one's perpetration. After much reflection over the participants' understanding of the terms "prejudice," "discrimination," "racism," and "racist," it occurred to me that there was a critical flaw in their logic. They believed the following:

1. Everyone is a racist to some degree;
2. Prejudice is a racist thought, whereas discrimination is a racist act;
3. One who can prevent his or her prejudiced thought from turning into a hateful act is not considered a racist; and, therefore,
4. Not everyone is a racist.

Statements 1 and 4 are clearly in contradiction with one another. One would either have to accept Statement 1 as true or Statement 4 as true, but one could not simultaneously accept both as true. The inconsistencies in the participants' responses propelled me to lead a discussion on the terms "race," "racism," "prejudice," and "discrimination" at one of the inquiry

group sessions. Throughout the study, the participants wrestled with their own identity as “racists” as well as their role in the perpetuation of racism in society.

Engaging Participants in Discourse on Race and Racism

In my attempt to get at the heart of racism as an individual pathology versus racism as a systemic issue, I presented the participants with a list of possible “counterdefinitions” from various scholarly work that contrasted the definitions from *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (1997). For example, *Webster’s Dictionary* (1997) defined *racism* as

a doctrine or teaching, without scientific support, that claims to find racial differences in character, intelligence, etc., that asserts the superiority of one race over another or others, and that seeks to maintain the supposed purity of a race or the races (p. 1106).

A “racist,” therefore, would be *one* who holds such doctrine or teaching. In contrast, Wellman, as cited in Tatum (1997), defined racism as “a system of advantages based on race” (p. 7), onto which Tatum (1997) added that it was “prejudice plus power” (p. 7). Based on Wellman and Tatum’s definitions of racism, a “racist” would be anyone who benefitted from this system of advantages and who believed that he or she was somehow entitled to such benefits.

Not surprisingly, some of the participants did not take well to the idea of being considered a racist by virtue of their membership in the circle of Whiteness alone. On hearing the two definitions, Karen chuckled, “So it sounds like there’s no way not to be a racist if you’re White.” In a less direct manner, Will also challenged the notion that racism was a system of *White* privilege. He raised the proposition that racism went beyond the color line and that anyone of any color could be culpable of committing racism at any time. He said, “I don’t like the term ‘reverse racism.’ I think racism is racism . . . [Y]ou can be the person on the other side and it’d still be racism.”

On this point, I, too, differed in opinion with Tatum, who believed that people of color were incapable of committing racism as, no matter how discriminatory their actions were, they could not receive the benefits reserved for the privileged class. I, as an Asian American female, by Tatum’s

definition lied outside the circle of privilege. I would, however, still consider myself a “racist” not on the basis of the benefits that I fail to receive as a racial minority but for living and perpetuating the ideology of Whiteness as well as for permitting the system to run its due course. But, more importantly, I believe that a witch hunt to determine who is and is not a racist misses the point entirely. As long as we are individuals on Tatum’s metaphor of the conveyor belt, we belong to a hegemonic system that perpetuates racism. As Scheurich (1993) reminds his White colleagues in the academy that they cannot invoke their commitment to antiracism to deny their participation in a sphere of White privilege, I would remind those of us who are educators of color that we, too, cannot invoke our race consciousness to nullify our contribution to racism’s continued existence. We are no less immune from society’s influences than Whites, and to assume an air of impenetrability would be to trivialize racism’s endemic nature.

Nevertheless, Will’s definition of racism versus discrimination brought out the crux of the individual versus system conundrum. If racism is not individual acts of hostility, then how do “prejudice” and “discrimination” fit into the equation? Building up on the idea that racism is a system of privilege, I suggested to the group an alternate way of looking at the term “prejudice,” which I interpreted as a “*belief in one’s own superiority over others such that one feels that he or she is entitled to the system of privileges based on power.*” Prejudice, then, is not just a person’s “irrational hatred of other races” as *Webster’s Dictionary* (1997) defined it (p. 1063). In fact, a prejudiced person would find it perfectly *rational* to desire the benefits that society has to offer; it would only be *irrational* if one seeks to purposefully give up his or her privileges in an effort to counter the system for the benefit of the racially oppressed.

On a similar note, I proposed the definition of “discrimination” as “an *action, usually with malicious intent, done toward minority groups based on one’s belief in his or her own superiority; typically occurs when one feels that his or her right to the system of privileges is being threatened.*” That is, one discriminates not necessarily because of personal contempt for members of the minority groups but more often because one fears the encroachment of minorities into his or her own privileged space. For example, when the courts mandated desegregation in neighborhood schools, those in the dominant group who could afford it fled to the suburbs in fear that the “colored folks” would deteriorate the quality of education afforded to their children at the public schools. Also, in this current age of increased global networking, the market’s demand for bilingual/multilingual speakers places monolingual

English speakers at a disadvantage. In fear of the losing millions of jobs that “rightfully” belong to the Whites, lawmakers across the nation fought to pass anti-immigration and English-only bills to keep minorities at a continued disadvantaged in the labor force. Thus, discrimination does not necessarily have to be a blatant, hateful *action* toward persons of color; it could very well be a *reaction* of resistance to “set things aright again” when one senses that his or her privileged space is being invaded on.

In the end, not everyone was convinced that simply because racism is rooted in a larger societal problem that they were somehow also part of that problem. Many continued to see a sharp distinction between an individual’s prejudices versus societal racism. A few, however, began to question whether there was some truth to the idea that racism is one’s condoning of a system that privileges one group over another. The postinterviews revealed that many of the teachers remained in the unconscious or the deceived perpetrators/activists camp while only a couple showed evidence of emerging into the enlightened perpetrators/activists category.

Toward a Journey of Race Consciousness

As was the case with the preinterviews, all of the participants stated in the postinterviews that they believed that racism was still a prevalent issue in society today. With regard to their recognition of their own role in perpetuating racism, the participants either held more adamantly to the resolution that “No, I’m not a racist” or they began to experience an internal struggle over the idea that they were in fact “unintentional racists.” One participant’s journey toward race consciousness was most worth mentioning because she demonstrated the process of critical self-reflection necessary to move from the deceived perpetrators/activists category to the enlightened perpetrators/activists category. Below is a narrative of her journey toward becoming more race conscious.

Karen: Wrestling With White Privilege

Of all of the participants, Karen was perhaps the most resistant to the counterhegemonic ideologies that were brought up in the inquiry group meetings. She saw herself as a passionate liberal, one who always advocated for the causes of the oppressed, and one who dedicated her life to serving disadvantaged children and families. She was, in essence, the prototype of the White, female social justice educator—compassionate, idealistic, and committed to the values of democracy and equality.

Over the course of the study, Karen's reaction to the inquiry group sessions became increasingly more cynical and defensive. When the participants worked together to deconstruct the curriculum to make it more culturally relevant, she took issues with the feasibility of such a practice in this time-constrained, test-driven school culture. With regard to the need to attend to the hidden curriculum in the textbooks, she complained about how such practices deviated from the actual lessons and how at times the sociopolitical implications were simply not age appropriate (Young, 2010). In particular, she was frustrated with the seeming anti-American stance that I raised to the fore every time I asked the participants to question the representativeness of the voices being presented in the curriculum.

At one inquiry group meeting, our conversation led to the 2008 presidential election. In an unprecedented election where the Democratic Party was to endorse either an African American or a female presidential candidate, the idea of not having a White male name on the ballot for a major political party sent the nation abuzz. As the teachers and I talked about the marvel of seeing a diverse range of candidates on the ballot, Karen said unexpectedly,

Quite honestly, what would you make of my attitude when I realized that when it came down to Barack Obama and Hillary, as much as I decided that I like Barack . . . there's a piece of me that is disappointed that it's not a White man only because I don't trust this country to elect a person of color?

Her comment elicited a response of outrage from Bob and a look of surprise from the rest of the participants. Karen dared to say out loud what many other Americans felt, but her candor floored everyone because in this day and age of racial sensitivity, such blatantly racist comments were deemed prohibitively politically incorrect. However, as I later wrote in my researcher journal, "I don't think Karen made that comment with a racist intent; I think she was exposing her vulnerabilities by saying that she recognize[d] that she *may* after all be a racist." This was the moment when I realized that Karen's seeming resistance to the topics discussed in the inquiry group sessions was a natural course of travel toward race consciousness. Karen did not simply take the theories presented to her at their face value; she wrestled with them, critiqued them, rejected them, and internalized them as they began to make more sense to her.

At the following session, she thanked me for reawakening her past learning on racism and critical literacy. Somewhere along this journey, she

realized that to be an antiracist pedagogue, she had to acknowledge the racist in herself. At the postinterview, she remarked,

this is the third time [that I've gone through training on race], and none of them [has been] comfortable. . . . However, I feel like it's essential if you're going to be an educator because we have to continue to live with that discomfort, and we have to be continually confronted with that discomfort or things will never, ever change.

Throughout the study, Karen's struggle with her own white privilege and her willingness to confront racism face-to-face moved her increasingly toward the enlightened perpetrators/activists camp. Karen recognized that becoming more race conscious is something that takes constant reawakening, introspection, and refinement, and it also takes an active commitment on one's part to live out his or her beliefs. Being enlightened is not the end of the journey, however; it is merely the beginning. How one continues to grapple with the paradox of one's own perpetration and activism throughout one's life journey is the true test of an antiracist pedagogue.

Discussion

The study's finding of the four personae of racism raised disconcerting evidence of how persistently the participants regarded racism as acts of individual pathology rather than as a systemic problem. Unlike previous literature that highlighted well-intentioned educators' unconscious racism (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Tatum, 1992), this study suggested that educators were in fact well aware of the phenomenon of racism in schools but instead were deceived by their activism to recognize how they were just as much a part of the problem as the "others" out there.

The participants' understanding of "social justice" was particularly telling of how they were deceived by their activism. In defining their view of multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and antiracist pedagogy, the participants primarily saw such practices as showing "respect/tolerance," "celebrating and affirming culture," and giving "attention to individuality/differentiated instruction." These codes appeared altogether 32 times in the data analysis. As the participants were already attentive to these strategies in their teaching, they believed that they *were* engaged in social justice work. However, two codes emerged in which the participants believed that social justice education was about "teaching different views" and engaging in

“critical self-reflection.” These codes appeared only three times in the data analysis. In other words, the participants saw social justice education as more about embracing the students’ individuality and their diversity rather than addressing issues of social and racial equality. This finding confirmed Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2009) study on preservice teachers’ attempt to engage in social justice education. In their study, they too found that the participants heavily emphasized the themes of “pupil learning” and “relationships and respect” while providing little evidence of the themes of “teacher as activist” and “recognizing inequalities.” Cochran-Smith et al. argued that “[d]espite their interest in teaching for social justice, the teachers in this study seldom offered critiques of the larger structures and arrangements of schooling, such as grading, tracking, and labeling of pupils” (p. 360). Findings from both studies suggested that even as the educators believed that they were engaged in social justice work, many of them were missing a critical element of their practice: the recognition that schools were rooted within a system of dominance and oppression.

As social justice education has often been criticized for being ambiguous and undertheorized (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009), perhaps a better way of teaching social justice education is by using the tenets behind CRT. CRT unabashedly begins with the proposition that racism is an endemic problem in U.S. society. Rather than challenging the existence of White privilege as an amorphous entity, CRT uses political and legal precedents to provide concrete examples of how Whiteness has garnered unmerited benefits throughout U.S. history. CRT also calls educators to attend to the counter-narratives of the oppressed and to work toward the elimination of all forms of oppression. It leaves no doubt as to the systemic nature of racism, and it pushes educators to actively confront it in the policies and practices of schools.

Unfortunately, as this and many other studies on social justice education reveal, educators are by and large deceived by their sensitivity toward the students’ cultural backgrounds to recognize that their “activism” merely perpetuates systemic inequalities. The beholding of a White-centered ideology renders all educators culpable of racism, in much the same way as Goldhagen (1996) argues that all Germans were complicit in the Holocaust. In fact, Spring (2004) argues that inattention to the practice of the hidden curriculum is tantamount to a horrific act of cultural genocide, which he defines as the “educational process of destroying a people’s culture and replacing it with a new culture” (p. 3). In the dominant group’s view, there is no better place than educational institutions to carry out this

Appendix

Inquiry Group Meeting Agenda

Week	Topic	Inquiry group discussion/activities
Preinterviews		
Phase 1: Raising educators' race consciousness through discussion of literature		
0		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants were asked to read an excerpt from Tatum's (1992) article, "Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom."
1	Awareness of one's own cultural identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We examined our own racial identity based on Helms's (1995) racial identity model for Whites and Cross's (1995) racial identity model for Blacks.
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Endemic nature of racism Cultural capital of Whiteness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We discussed issues of White privilege, the pervasiveness of racism, colorblindness vs. color consciousness, the theory of hegemony, and the legal means by which the dominant group seeks to reassert its "natural rights."
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Power and the construction of knowledge Critique of the standard curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We discussed Foucault's theory of power and knowledge and whether the present-day standards movement imposed the knowledge of the dominant group onto minority racial groups or that it equalized the right to knowledge for "all" students.
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Savior mentality Acculturation or deculturalization? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We discussed unintentional racist beliefs transpired through the mentality of "rescuing" minority students from a state of oppression. We also discussed whether the purpose of schools was to prepare minority students to function in an existing, White-dominant world or to prepare them to challenge an existing unjust world.
Phase 2: Conceptualizing and actualizing culturally relevant pedagogy		
5	Defining culturally relevant pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We discussed the theoretical underpinnings to Ladson-Billings's (1995) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. We broke up into small groups to construct a "checklist" of characteristics that exemplified culturally relevant pedagogy.

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Week	Topic	Inquiry group discussion/activities
6	Applying culturally relevant pedagogy to lesson planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers brought in curriculum guides, broke up into small groups, critiqued the curriculum guides for any hidden curriculum, and attempted to make the guides more culturally relevant.
	Classroom observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I conducted classroom observations based on lessons that the teachers had planned with culturally relevant pedagogy in mind.
7	Coding and crosschecking classroom observation transcripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers analyzed and coded their own transcripts from the classroom observations. The principal and the intern reviewed the researchers' coding of the classroom observation transcripts. We discussed the challenges in planning and teaching a lesson based on culturally relevant pedagogy.
8	Review of concepts and final reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I reviewed with the participants the key concepts that the study intended to cover using case studies scenarios, and we discussed the major learnings from the inquiry group sessions.
Postinterviews		

act of "ethnic cleansing." Under the laws of mandatory attendance, virtually all students must undergo the process of learning the rules, beliefs, and traditions of what it means to be an "American." Sadly, educators conveniently serve as the agents of deculturalization, even as their social activism is masked in the cultural genocide of millions of schoolchildren on a daily basis.

Appendix

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Bio

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